

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 222 406

SO 014 287

AUTHOR Konrad, Victor
TITLE Retrospect and Respect for the Past. Revised.
PUB DATE Sep 82
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Special Session on "Uses and Misues of the Past," (San Antonio, TX, April 26, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; *History; North American History; *Preservation; *Public Opinion; Research Needs; *Social Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The movement toward preservation of historical sites and objects has shifted from professional preservationists to a diverse population of individuals. Allegiance to the past has given way to recreating the past. Historical discovery occurs, for example, through visits to restructured historic sites where activities illustrate notions of how life must have been. Authenticity and documentation have been replaced by the fun and recreation of visiting such places. Heritage marketing now dominates the housing market and one can even purchase strains of seeds to recreate a 19th century garden. Direct experience of the past occurs through festivals in which communities return to costumes and customs of 100 years ago. The challenge, then, is to align preservation policies with the way people view the past. In order to create some order from these chaotic activities, the professional preservationist needs to understand the full impact of our sense of the past, based both on group heritage and individual experiences. (KC)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED222406

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Victor Konrad

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RETROSPECT AND RESPECT FOR THE PAST

Victor Konrad

Department of Anthropology
University of Maine
Orono, ME 04469

SP 014287

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of
American Geographers, Special Session on "Uses and Misuses of
the Past", April 26, 1982, San Antonio.

Revised September, 1982

ABSTRACT

Historical appreciation is motivated by everything from personal memory to consumer peer pressure. Similarly, historical preservation, the manifestation of appreciation, is linked to varied motives in turn tied to distinct values. Rather than add richness and depth to what is preserved, these different and often contradictory underlying values have characteristically resulted in chaotic preservation landscapes. While limiting the basis of preservation in our time is as impossible and undesirable as attempting preservation in perpetuity, it is argued that preservation based on group heritage and individual experience is more valid than efforts arising from motivations to conserve or acknowledge the old.

It is taken for granted that historical appreciation leads people directly to historical preservation. Convinced of the necessity for appreciation, stewards of the movement immediately decry its absence if preservation attempts fail. Some complain that the carefully restored 18th century townscape of lower Quebec is neglected by residents and tourists alike who prefer to stroll the mixed centuries of the upper city.¹ An elderly Parisien rails at vandals who paint Montagne's nose, apply nipples to his bodice and cover the statue's inscription with rock concert advertisements. "They have no respect for the past," he agonizes.

But do the thousands of Americans who frequent Ghirardelli Square², and its clones across the United States and Canada, sincerely relate to the past? Scrubbed warehouses and degreased factories, liberally appointed with suspended machinery and tropical plants are now considered successful preservation. These places make use of the past, and most important for some, they make money with the past. Yet in these temporally veneered shops and restaurants the past is only the *hors d'ouvres*. Once the "home-made-daily" soup arrives historical awareness also is suspended.

Acknowledging that there are other ways to evaluate the impact and problems of the historic preservation movement,³ this essay explores the ways in which people look at the past and how their views shape appreciation and ultimately

preservation of the past. It seeks to define the dimensions of historical appreciation which are genuinely based in a respect for the past, and which ultimately and consistently lead to preservation of the valued past.

Retrospect and Historical Appreciation

As more of Western society participates in acknowledging the past, and particularly its tangible remnants, the nature of retrospect becomes more diverse. Motivations to look back, to scrutinize old things, and ultimately to refurbish survivals, are many and often seemingly unrelated to historical appreciation. In Toronto, strong peer group pressures and the lure of quick profits force "Cabbagetown" owners to reconstruct or invent Victorian facades for their rowhouses.⁴ Relationships with the tangible past are not governed. If rules once existed for historical appreciation, they are no longer apparent.⁵ Rites of passage to prove allegiance: membership in historical and archaeological societies, comprehensive collections of artifacts, attention to chronology - all are no longer necessary to relate to the past. Now you merely follow the crowd to the nearest living history farm where you can join anytime. As long as you participate, hold hands and join in the fun of recreating the past, canons of authenticity and documentation can be overlooked and even disregarded. The exhilaration of historical discovery and self-awareness should not be

mutated by excessive attention to the truth. After all, our historical knowledge is at best incomplete. Although historical site managers and interpreters will not admit to this view, implementation of historical programs appear increasingly based on notions of how it must have been as opposed to how it actually was. To a degree this is how it must be for we are viewing the past selectively through contemporary eyes focused in retrospect by modern values.⁶ But the appreciation is too often for ourselves and not the past as we proclaim.

The constituency for historical preservation has changed. A dedicated few in the twentieth century spread the preservation message to many who in the late twentieth century selected, emphasized and excluded to conform with a new set of retrospective views. Surveys of Torontonians' attitudes toward the past and involvements with historical remnants, carried out in the 1970's, showed that historical professionals and society members viewed the past in a more circumscribed manner than the majority of twelve hundred residents interviewed.⁷ Sentiments toward the past were almost as positive among residents as among avowed preservationists. However, where the dedicated established limits of authenticity and resource potential, the public moved easily from collecting old medicine bottles to embellishing twentieth century houses with nineteenth century finials. And while professionals brooded about

dilution of a time-honoured past, the public increased its vigorous exploration of historical remains.⁸

Today, the "true believer"⁹ stands alone as historical preservation evolves and passes by. As David Lowenthal observes, present-day preservation is of the moment due to the pace of change and the constant turnover of tangible elements in the landscape.¹⁰ When we reflect on the past, we feel an urgency to "freeze frame"¹¹ the historical elements before they disappear. Similarly, the preservation specialist is faced with the dilemma of integrating a still developing philosophy of how to deal with the past, with rapidly changing views of the past. While preservationists are overwhelmed by this and other pressing problems, the public often learns on its own how to enjoy and savour the past. Again, to develop Lowenthal's point, today historical "consciousness is a new experience."¹² And tomorrow, because of accelerating change, it will be possible to have another new experience with the past. This phenomenon in its own right accounts for increased historical awareness, positive sentiments toward the past, and vastly increased involvement with historical settings.

For example, in Freeport, Maine, where residents are characteristically well educated, married and financially comfortable professionals with many hedonistic and ecotopian experiences behind them, renovating Cape Cod houses and particularly re-establishing nineteenth-century life at

the Pettengill salt-water farm¹³ promise new experiences. Perhaps these new experiences will last and sustain the interest of Freeport residents; perhaps the past will be but another experience.

If the current preservation movement is but a passing phase it may be approaching what is described as a "cusp catastrophe"¹⁴ - the wave of commitment builds with growing interest and involvement; then it begins to fold as people realize the futility of preservation ideals; finally, it collapses to a lower level of idealism at the point of instability. Those who monitor the preservation movement in North America may recognize the metaphor. A retrospective look at preservation in the Old World suggests a cyclical recurrence of preservationist empathy.¹⁵ Whatever the outcome in North America a considerable change appears imminent.

It appears historic preservation is no longer in the grasp of preservationists. "Reagonomics" aside, the movement in North America, and likely throughout the Western world, is at a critical juncture. The increasing scarcity of resources for preservation, whether things to preserve or money to preserve them, makes it even more important to decide on directions for the guiding force. The criterion of historic appreciation, long used to focus preservation efforts and then evaluate them, does not seem adequate as an underlying philosophy of today's use of the past. It has strong intellectual underpinnings. Knowledge of the

past is important, and more knowledge of the past is more important.¹⁶ Insistence on specific restoration procedures is another mechanism to focus historical appreciation.¹⁷ Here again the tendency among preservationists is to evaluate preservation success on attention to detail and the accomplishment of restoration minutiae. The meticulous replacement of stone figures on the front exterior of Wells Cathedral in England evokes considerably more attention and appreciation from residents and visitors than the Cathedral itself. In fact it is almost impossible to find a good vantage point to view the church in its entirety.

Sense of the Past

A fuller "sense of the past", to use the current catch-phrase, may be achieved by not tying historical preservation to historical appreciation alone. Rather, a sense of the past also derives from unconscious retrospection. Children learn lineage and succession at an early age. Before any history lessons begin, they are able to relate to the past, put it in perspective and recognize its absence. Among the many other contributors to a sense of the past are colours, patterns, assemblages, and textures which evoke responses that make us comfortable and happy.¹⁸ The direct connection with history often is not made; the collector of Indian arrowheads maintains a sense of the past but lacks considerably in historical appreciation. He can describe

each artifact in detail, conjure up its relationship to other artifacts, relate its use by humans and even tell how it got to be where it was found. The artifact triggers a flood of emotion and belief about the past and develops a personal scenario or image not at all in line with the determined and accepted past.

Studies of retrospection in Toronto suggest several dimensions which transcend the commonly held notion of historical appreciation.¹⁹ Two of these appear time and again in other explorations of how people look back. One is a marked affinity for heritage, either small "h" describing personal, family and community ties, or big "H" viewed as personal interpretations of regional or national patrimony. The other is individual and group experience with something tangible from the past. Both dimensions are recognized by preservationists, but only some expressions of these ways of dealing with the past are sanctioned. A broader view is necessary to understand and acknowledge the full impact of our sense of the past.

Heritage Appreciation

The feeling of heritage or for heritage is so strong that the marketing professional considers a "touch of the past" an asset in selling just about anything. In order to pass on the skill, the College of Business Administration at the University of Florida is seeking an Anthropologist

with background in cross-cultural heritage arts and crafts.²⁰

Houses are heritage. Increasingly, architects, builders and realtors incorporate designs, textures and slogans to sell people new houses with a past. At the Ideal Homes exhibit in Earls Court, London, heritage is the key to attracting long queues of potential buyers and many who just want to look. The models, like the actual houses, are new - the steep pitched roofs, timber frames, stair railings and other details are reminiscent of several centuries of British house building. They are not replicas and they are not meant to be. The "buy" line for the featured house reads: "Discerning people say it should be the House of the Year. We believe it to be the House of the Century...".²¹ An embroidered-look brochure for another kind of dwelling claims "A lifetime of holidays in your own Cornish cottage".²²

Heritage marketing has entered the garden seed business as well. It is now possible to purchase an Heirloom Garden²³ consisting of up to four varieties of common garden vegetables like corn, tomatoes, beans and squash. However, all the strains are nineteenth century varieties, the seed envelopes are crafted from high fiber paper, and the garden organisation chart is based on recorded garden plans. I bought an Heirloom Garden - perhaps it will confuse my twentieth century bugs. If any of the seeds survive germination and the elements, they will certainly confuse future archaeologists.

Sensing the Past through Experience with Remains

The Heirloom Garden also helps one relate to the tangible past, and indeed to recreate it. There is plenty of opportunity to reconstruct an element of the past to any degree desired. One can tackle the garden plot with old tools and in traditional garb, or one can take the roto-tiller to it and simply taste the harvest of tradition.

Direct experience with survivals can also lead to an enhanced sense of the past. Many living farms and outdoor historical museums have staff engage in constant experiments with old ways of doing things, not just to demonstrate to the visitor but also to explore what it was really like to winnow grain, card wool and complete a wide range of other tasks. At King's Landing, a historical farm near Fredericton, New Brunswick, two elderly farmers originally were hired to re-establish the old ways on the farm. They did not work out. They knew a nearer past, and were not about to learn a different one. They were replaced by Max and Colby, two young ex-urbanites who learned to farm, and are now learning to farm in the nineteenth century manner.²⁴ Experience with the past demands commitment but it also develops it.

A good example of group commitment to experiencing the past is Chicoutimi's *Carnaval Souvenir*.²⁵ Every February, as in the past twenty years, Chicoutimi, Quebec, reverts briefly to life perceived as one hundred years ago.

In 1982 the community returned to 1882 in period costume to recreate lumber camp conditions and perhaps too liberal a sampling of assorted good time events. However, the event does highlight traditions of big talking (or boasting) and jig-dancing, two pastimes which have not disappeared. VIA rail Canada obliges by sending the "Old-Timers" train from Montreal.

In Maine, the lumber woods is off limits. Saw blades, cables and even entire trains rust throughout thousands of acres of forest owned by absentee investors and strictly regulated by managers. Those who remember the woods camps, or would like others to, must rely on stories and photographs to affirm their experience.²⁶

This form of experience with the past may be possible with direct connections. Where considerable time and culture intervene, direct experience has always been difficult. Presenting archaeological remains to the public is plagued with problems of protecting a fragile legacy and transmitting understanding and respect for a distant past. In the suburb of Hawkwood, near Calgary, Melcor Developments Limited, in association with the archaeological Survey of Alberta, established the "Past in Place".²⁷ Artifacts, excavation cross-sections and dioramas are found where the site was discovered. To this context is added community stewardship of the exhibit. The residents of Hawkwood see their link with the past, and visitors see it as well.

Real estate prices have not suffered.

Conclusion

Preservation would be less complicated if the past were always in place. In some cultures it is put in place. The Tanna of the New Hebrides invest "Big Men" with the role of keeping the knowledge and interpreting the past.²⁸ Their retrospective serves the rest of Tanna, they respect the past, and all their people respect them for it. In Western society, retrospect is more diverse and respect for the past is highly uneven. Probably this will not change. Our challenge is to recognize the dimensions of retrospect at a given time and to align preservation policies with the way people view the past. This will assure that when people turn to the past what they see will evoke their respect and in turn enhance their support of preservation.

References

1. M. Belanger et A. Gendreau, "Le reamenagement du Vieux-Québec", Communication présentée au colloque international de géographie appliquée à Tbilisi, Georgie Soviétique, 1976.
2. Ghirardelli Square, San Francisco, a forerunner and trend setter of the adaptive re-use of inner city structures, was converted from a chocolate factory into a commercial complex in the 1960's. For an update see: "San Francisco: Is there a future for the Past?" Preservation News 14, 7 (July 1979), p. 1.
3. For example, one can examine the uncoordinated directions of the historic preservation movement. An essay employing this approach is Joseph S. Wood, "Substance or History, A Critical Essay on Historic Preservation", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, April 26, 1982, San Antonio.
4. See the detailed discussion of "Cabbagetown" story in Deryck Holdsworth, "Heritage Fabrication and High-Tech Chic", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Special Session on "Uses and Misuses of the Past", April 26, 1982, San Antonio.
5. This notion is introduced in David Lowenthal's introduction to: David Lowenthal and Marcus Binney, eds., Our Past Before Us, Why Do We Save It? London: Temple Smith, 1981, p. 14.
6. For discussions of this phenomenon see: A. Toffler, Future Shock, New York: Bantam, p. 390; Kevin Lynch, What Time is This Place? Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, pp. 55-57. The filter of contemporary values is also discussed in Fred Davis, Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia, New York: Free Press, 1979.
7. Victor Konrad, Orientations Toward the Past in the Environment of the Present: Retrospect in Metropolitan Toronto, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, McMaster University, pp. 327-373.
8. Victor Konrad and Martin Taylor, "Retrospective Orientations in Metropolitan Toronto", Urban History Review 9, 2 (October 1980), pp. 65-86.

9. Eric Hoffer, The True Believer, New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
10. Lowenthal, "Caring for the Past: Changing Attitudes", in Lowenthal and Binney, Our Past Before Us, pp. 17-21.
11. This term originates in the movie industry. It is used here in the sense of capturing time and experience. This is the context of "Freeze Frame" by the J. Geils Band.
12. Lowenthal, "Caring for the Past", p. 17.
13. This is a joint venture in historical preservation and interpretation by the Freeport Historical Society and Maine Audubon, and supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.
14. R. Thom, Structural Stability and Morphogenesis, Reading, Mass.: W. A. Benjamin, 1975.
15. Hugh Prince, "Real, Imagined and Abstract Worlds of the Past", in R. Chorley and P. Haggett, eds., Progress in Geography, 3 (1971), pp. 1-86. See also Hugh Prince, "Revival, Restoration, Preservation: Changing Views about Antique Landscape Features", in Lowenthal and Binney, Our Past Before Us, pp. 33-50.
16. Daniel J. Boorstin, "The Landscape of American History", in Visiting Our Past, America's Historylands, Washington: National Geographic Society, 1977, pp. 11-16.
17. Almost every issue of Historic Preservation and Canadian Heritage has articles which emphasize restoration procedures. This focus has in turn spawned popular journals like the Old House Journal which consists of only "how to do it" articles.
18. The research on relationships between design attributes of historical settings and a sense of the past remains to be tackled.
19. Victor Konrad and Martin Taylor, "Scaling Dispositions Toward the Past", Environment and Behavior 12 (September 1980), pp. 283-307.
20. This unique position was advertised widely among Anthropology Departments and in the Chronicle of Higher Education during the spring of 1982.

21. "Heritage by Potton", What House Magazine, supplement, 1982.
22. "A lifetime of holidays in your own Cornish cottage," Cottage Holiday Associates, Cornwall, 1982.
23. "The Heirloom Garden", Cornell University, Office of Extension pamphlet.
24. This story is not relayed to the public. It was told in hushed tones during a staff meeting.
25. "Chicoutimi's Carnaval Souvenir 1882", VIA Rail Itinerary, February 12, 1982.
26. "Images of Aroostook, 1875-1945," University of Maine at Presque Isle, 1982.
27. "The Past in Place", Melcor Developments Ltd., 1981.
28. Lamont Lindstrom, "Bigman or Chief? Knowledge in the Political Process on Tanna", Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers 57-58 (1978).